

# Issues of Sexuality and Pregnancy Affecting Youth in DCYF Care

Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families

**Policy: 700.0160**

*Effective Date: March 23, 1988 Version: 1*

It is a priority of the Department to ensure that good health care is provided to all of the children and adolescents which it serves. It is especially important that Department staff provide accurate information and coordinate referrals in a timely manner when a youth has issues about sexuality and/or pregnancy. The DCYF primary service worker should inform the youth, early in the casework relationship, that he/she is available to provide information and to coordinate referrals for service.

Many children who are in the care of the Department, especially those placed out of their homes, will experience critical stages of their sexual development while living in a setting where they lack parental guidance. Therefore, the Department requires caseworkers to receive training in the area of adolescent sexuality. Foster parents and social workers are encouraged to provide accurate and helpful information to a youth who has questions and concerns. Most residential and non-residential child care programs are required by the Department to address the youth's need for age-appropriate information about sexuality. In many situations an adolescent will present, to the caseworker, sensitive issues that he or she is unable to discuss with any other person. It is imperative that the worker immediately respond to these concerns to meet the needs of the client by using the skills he/she has developed through education and training. The worker may also confer with the unit supervisor and utilize resources available through the Rhode Island Department of Health and the Rhode Island Department of Human Services. The worker should encourage and assist the client in acquiring necessary health care services.

The Department has the responsibility to ensure the provision of health care services to a teenager in its care who is pregnant or suspects she is pregnant. It is also important to address and meet the needs of the adolescent male who is facing issues of sexuality such as the prospect of becoming sexually active or the prospect of becoming a father. The worker should assist the child who suspects she is pregnant in setting up an appointment for a pregnancy test. If the pregnancy is confirmed, the Department has a responsibility to ensure that the youth is informed of the options available. The adolescent must receive counseling to assist her in making an informed and appropriate decision based on her own unique situation. The parents of the youth should be involved, if possible, in the decision making process to provide emotional and/or financial support. If a teen chooses to terminate her pregnancy, she may want to consult with her parents in this decision-making process. However, in accordance with RIGL 23-4.7-6, the teen may decide, with the approval of the Family Court, to terminate her pregnancy without parental knowledge or consent. In this situation, the teen must file a petition pursuant to the above cited statute with the Family Court to seek approval.

There are many agencies located throughout the State which are equipped to deal with the physical and emotional needs of the adolescent around issues of sexuality and pregnancy in a professional and effective manner. It is important for the DCYF social worker to be aware of the resources that exist in the community and to encourage and support the youth's continuing participation in good health care.

The worker can access the on-line Resource Manual, for a listing of family planning agencies and adolescent pregnancy and parenting programs available in Rhode Island.

### **Related Procedure**

[Issues of Sexuality and Pregnancy Affecting Youth in DCYF Care](#)

## Issues of Sexuality and Pregnancy Affecting Youth in DCYF Care

### **Procedure From Policy 700.0160: Issues of Sexuality and Pregnancy Affecting Youth in DCYF Care**

- A. Early in the casework relationship, worker should inform the youth that he/she is available to provide information and to assist the youth in securing needed services.
- B. When a youth has concerns about issues of sexuality or pregnancy, worker immediately responds to the youth's needs:
  - 1. Worker encourages the youth to express his/her feelings and concerns and to ask questions; and
  - 2. Worker provides helpful and accurate information.
- C. Worker informs the youth about community programs and agencies that are equipped to deal with his/her emotional and physical needs.
- D. Worker assists youth in choosing an appropriate facility or program that will meet his/her specific needs. If possible, a program which is located in the geographic area of the youth's home or placement should be utilized (refer to on-line Resource Manual).
- E. Worker encourages and can assist the youth in scheduling an appointment with an appropriate facility. The youth should make the contact with the facility to schedule an appointment.
- F. Worker assists the youth by coordinating services (i.e. transportation, scheduling) to meet his/her individual needs.